Interview with G. Richard Monsen

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G. RICHARD MONSEN

Interviewed by: Hans Tuch

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Q: This is Hans Tuch interviewing Richard Monsen. Today is August 22, 1988, and we're speaking in Washington, D.C. Dick Monsen is a retired USIA Foreign Service officer who has had a very interesting and varied experience during his career with the U.S. Information Agency.

Entry Into USIA by Way of State Department

Today, we're going to be discussing really three major interesting aspects of that career which I think are of particular interest to this project. But first let me introduce it by saying that Dick was born in Utah in 1921, attended the University of Utah where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree and then received a Master of Arts degree at Stanford University. He came into USIA in 1955, and that really gives me the opportunity to ask my first question. What brought you to USIA? How did you get into our work?

MONSEN: I had a Fulbright scholarship to France in 1949-50, and when I came back from that, I was looking for a job, and I was introduced to some people in the State Department and was offered a job there on the basis of my knowledge of French affairs. But after I had made the rounds I was ultimately offered a job on the Argentine desk, which I guess is par

for the course. So I worked for about three or four years in ARA in the State Department, first on the Argentine desk and then on the Brazil desk. During my time in the State Department, USIA had been separated from the Department. As I remember, just about all the officers I knew in the State Department thought that it was a mistake to have separated the Agency, that it was in fact such a mistake that inevitably a year or two later it would be brought back into the State Department.

About that time I was offered a job by USIA at a substantial increase over my salary, and my boss in the State Department urged me to take it because he said, “I am sure that within two years at the most you will probably be back within the State Department and at a grade higher than you are now, so I would urge you to take it.” I took it, although at that time I was quite happy where I was.

So I went to USIA and was assigned to IOP (Office of Policy and Plans). IOP in those days had geographic breakdowns, and I was in the Latin American section of it. So I worked quite happily there for a few years. Frank Oram at that time was the area director and my boss. Ted Streibert was the Agency director when I first arrived but was soon replaced. Abbott Washburn was the man I dealt with most of the time.

But in any event, I went overseas in '58 and was assigned to the Bologna Center of the Johns Hopkins SAIS because the Agency wanted me to study regional European affairs with the expectation that I would be assigned in Europe, which proved to be the case. After a very delightful year at Bologna I was assigned to Paris as Information Officer, and later I became Deputy PAO.

The 1960 Summit Conference in ParisDisrupted by U-2 Affairs

While I was the Information Officer there, one incident occurred that sticks in my memory as rather historic and interesting—the 1960 summit conference.

Q: I am particularly interested in hearing your comments on that because I was in Moscow at that time and preparing for the visit of the President and subsequently the U-2 affair. I think this is when you were in Paris and having your experience there. So please go on.

MONSEN: When the conference first started we knew nothing about the U-2, but it had just barely gotten underway when the news broke that the U-2 had been shot down.

Q: That was May 1, 1960.

MONSEN: I remember it was sometime in May in 1960, but I don't remember the date. But in any event, there were no meetings of all the chiefs of state held during the whole summit. Khrushchev was meeting privately with de Gaulle, and Eisenhower met with de Gaulle and so on. Late that afternoon Khrushchev called a press conference out at the old NATO headquarters at the Palace du Trocadero in Paris. Andrew Berding, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, had been my boss in IOP earlier. I rode out to the press conference with him, and we sat in the audience there when Khrushchev came out and in short order denounced the United States and said that the conference was off and he was on his way home with all kinds of dire words about the United States.

Khrushchev Cancels Eisenhower Invitation to Moscow

Q: And President Eisenhower was uninvited?

MONSEN: Yes, was dis-invited you might say.

Q: Dis-invited.

MONSEN: This was about 6 o'clock in the afternoon. Although I was the Information Officer in Paris at the time, for the conference I had been designated as the Policy Guidance Officer. That meant giving guidance to our Voice of America and our IPS representative who were covering the conference, and also sending back guidance cables

to Washington. Andy Berding told me, “Dick, I'm going to have dinner tonight with Bill Cody” (PAO in Paris). He said, “I'll drop you off at your office in the Embassy, and I want you to write the best damned policy guidance you've ever written.” And he said, “After Bill and I have had dinner, we'll come back and I'll look at it.” Everything that was sent out had to be cleared through Berding. Needless to say, I went back and worked like hell while Berding and Cody went out to dinner.

I should say parenthetically at this point that I had been in Paris slightly less than a year. At that point I had not been getting along too well with my boss, Bill Cody, even though he had selected me for my job. I had been having a rough time with him. I simply couldn't seem to win his confidence.

In any event, Cody and Andy Berding came back from their dinner. I had just finished writing this guidance cable, so I handed it to Berding. He read it over and said, “Dick, that's absolutely on target. Just what was called for.” And he handed it to Cody and said, “Bill, what do you think about this?” Bill was always more of a cultural officer than he was a political officer, but nevertheless he read it and said, “Yep, fine, fine. It's fine.”

So the cable was sent off and that became the Agency guidance on that. From that day on Cody was marvelous to work with. I never had another moment's problem with him. Anyway, that's a rather personal side effect of the conference.

U.S. Soviet Relationship Sours

Q: That was an interesting period, the period that followed. With the U-2 shot down and our relationship, the Soviet-U.S. relationship, really went into a nosedive.

MONSEN: Oh, yes.

Q: It had been building up through the spirit of Camp David and then we had had Nixon over in the Soviet Union and Khrushchev had been in New York and Washington. This

was supposed to be sort of the next step with Eisenhower visiting the Soviet Union, and our preparations had gone forward for several weeks. And then the nosedive similar to the one that the U-2 took, the relationship took.

MONSEN: Yes, we noticed that also in another sense. In the spring, earlier before the summit conference, there was this movement of trying to effect a thaw and improve relations with the Soviet embassy in Paris. We organized an Evening in Paris. We invited a whole group of Soviet officers and their wives, not to the embassy residence but to the old Rothschild mansion. That, by the way, is now the new embassy residence but at that time was where USIA had a lot of offices. We had a big hall there and invited the Soviet diplomats and their wives to come over for a film showing. I remember we showed them the old film, Marty, and we had then a short program of jazz and a few other things and afterward drinks and hors d'oeuvres and stuff were served. So it was all a very jolly, congenial sort of a gathering. They were supposed to have reciprocated with a similar one at their embassy, but then after the U-2 they never did. So I never got inside the Soviet embassy.

Q: This really started the cold war again. Let me ask you, there are really three assignments that you've had which are, I would say, unique for USIA career officers to have and they're out of the ordinary. One of them came really right after your Paris assignment. You became the USIA adviser at the United Nations in New York when Arthur Goldberg was the Ambassador to the United Nations. But that particular position in this case encompassed a number of jobs. So I think this is a very interesting thing for you to relate.

Monsen Assigned as USIA Adviser at UN

MONSEN: I was sent up there with my official title—in fact, I had several. The one that sounded the most pompous and imposing was really the least important: “Principal USIA

Officer" in New York. But basically all that consisted of was going over and reviewing a classified newsreel project once a week that went by the name of Kingfish.

Q: Oh, yes, I remember that.

MONSEN: But that only lasted about maybe four or five months, and the Agency with my full agreement decided to cancel that newsreel project.

Q: The whole project was canceled.

MONSEN: The whole project. I was also in charge of the USIS Foreign Press Center. I was fortunate to have an assistant there, Bill Stricker—

Q: Who became the—

MONSEN: Who later on my recommendation became the Director of the Center, because he knew it well and was very effective with all of the New York foreign press.

Q: He had been in New York for a long time.

MONSEN: A million years, yes. I think he had been in New York with the Voice—the old OWI, then the Voice of America, and he'd simply stayed on there. The USIA Press Center was just a block away from the U.S. Mission headquarters, so I was able to go back and forth and Bill Stricker was also. He would come over to my office to read the cables and for guidance and so on. That was a happy relationship I had with Bill.

Press Center Competition Between Adlai Stevensonand Kennedy White House

By the way, there's an interesting sidelight on that too. When Adlai Stevenson was Ambassador there, he had a very effective press operation going much to the chagrin of the Kennedys, because they felt that he had sort of an open door to The New York Times and the other New York press which they lacked. So to more or less counteract that, it

was the Kennedys and Pierre Salinger who opened the Press Center in New York. Then they could send up their own spokesmen to the Press Center to counterbalance Adlai Stevenson's press. When Goldberg first arrived he was made nervous by the fact that there was a Press Center there with activities going on that he didn't know anything about. So when I was assigned to the U.S. mission to the UN as the Public Affairs Adviser and also as the press spokesman for the Mission, Goldberg was instrumental in seeing to it that I was also the Director of the Press Center so that he would know what was going on and that I would be his man as well as Washington's. As a matter of fact, it was a totally different situation at that point because the Agency and Washington had to a considerable degree lost interest in the Press Center, and they didn't send up nearly the number of speakers, or spokesmen, that they had done in the past.

Arthur Goldberg Enticed Off Supreme Court byLyndon Johnson to be U.S. Ambassador to UN

Q: What was it like working for Arthur Goldberg?

MONSEN: It was rather strange in a way. He was personally a very nice man and a very bright man, brilliant, I would say. But also an extraordinarily vain and thin-skinned man. I think by the time I got to know him he realized that he had made a mistake when he allowed Johnson to persuade him to leave the Supreme Court and go to the UN. When we were within the Mission and with him privately, we always referred to him as Mr. Justice. When we were outside the Mission at the UN officially, then he became Mr. Ambassador, but he preferred the title Mr. Justice.

At the beginning of my assignment he was much easier to work with and our work there was much easier than a short time later when his relations with the White House began to break down. He had been sent up to the UN with a very tempting assignment. To entice him off the court President Johnson persuaded him that we had to negotiate an end to the war in Vietnam. Goldberg had made a name as a labor negotiator, and he was known as

the “great negotiator.” Goldberg told me that, in order to persuade him to take the UN job, President Johnson told him that the end to the Vietnam War would probably be negotiated in the corridors of the UN. He flattered Goldberg by saying, “You are the great negotiator. You could do it. And who knows? If you could bring about a negotiated peace in Vietnam, the Nobel Peace Prize, the Secretary of State—who knows what?” By the way, Leonard Marks later confirmed this to me.

But LBJ Undercuts Goldberg

When he first went up there, he was active in trying to get negotiations going, and the White House didn't mind. But unbeknownst to Goldberg somewhere along the line Johnson finally decided that the war could be won and he didn't want Goldberg messing around trying to stir up negotiations. But he didn't tell Goldberg that. This was all very secret. In fact, his plans about Vietnam for a long time were secret, but it made Goldberg's relationship with the White House very difficult, which made my role as a press spokesman very difficult, because anything that appeared in the paper with a New York dateline was immediately suspect and usually criticized by the White House. Goldberg insisted that I live in Manhattan partly because he wanted me to go out at 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night and pick up the first edition of The New York Times to review it to see if there were any stories in it that were going to cause us problems with the White House. If there were, then I would either telephone him or on some occasions even go down to his suite at the Waldorf to discuss these stories. It made for a very difficult relationship with Washington, and it meant that my own work as press spokesman became a lot trickier because I was under considerable restraints as to what could be said or what might become offensive to the White House.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War and its Effect at the UN

During the period I was there the most interesting thing that happened was the June war between Israel and the Arabs. About a month before the war started, the Security

Council started meeting to try to bring about some kind of easing of tension in Arab-Israeli relations. After the war began and for several months thereafter, the Security Council met almost every day. By every day I really mean every night, because the delegates on the Security Council at the UN became acutely conscious of the fact that this was a highly interesting subject to people in New York and it was regularly covered by television. They were playing for the biggest audience, and so they would call a meeting at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, promptly adjourn until 8:30, and then the meetings would all be at night so that they would get full exposure on prime-time television. But it meant that for those of us who were working the hours became terrible. I would regularly get home after midnight.

Q: Other than being Justice Goldberg's press spokesman in New York, was there an important argument, what kind of role was there for USIA and USIA's representation at the UN? What was the role that we played?

MONSEN: In those days we had regularly assigned to the UN a bureau of the Wireless File and, of course, the VOA.

Q: VOA correspondent.

MONSEN: Yes. The VOA correspondent was Dick Walton. I used to meet regularly with those people. Particularly when the situation was fast moving or tense, I would meet with them and explain to them what I knew of our strategy and the line that they could be most usefully taking to help us. I must say that I never had any problems at all. The Wireless File correspondent and the VOA reporter were both very professional and cooperative.

Spotty Utilization of USIA Adviserby Ambassador Goldberg

Q: Now, under normal circumstances the UN Ambassador obviously has his small embassy staff. He has a political counselor, economic counselor, advisers. Your role as the public affairs adviser, did he need it? Did he use it?

MONSEN: Yes and no. In press affairs, yes. In some others, no. He needed it but he didn't use it much. I did take part in all of the planning sessions of his major speeches. In fact, I took part in the planning sessions for the opening speech at the General Assembly. It was usually the President or sometimes the Secretary of State who would give the opening speech in the fall. We all had a chance to participate in that, and I did. My views were listened to there. In the speeches I was able to get in some points that we wanted.

In the actual writing of the speeches, Goldberg had a few eccentricities that we were unable to talk him out of. He loved to quote himself. He would say, “As I said on such and such a date.” And then because he was repeating himself, the newspapers, realizing that he'd made that same point two or three times before, would not pick it up. And he couldn't understand why. I couldn't persuade him that because he had made that statement or made that point repeatedly in other speeches and was visibly quoting himself meant that you couldn't expect these reporters to give that much attention to it. Since he was a sensitive man with a strong ego, we always had a little bit of a problem because he said “I” so much. We used to try to joke with him a little when we were going over drafts of speeches saying, “Mr. Justice, don't you think that there are few too many perpendicular pronouns in there?” And he would laugh, but he'd say, “That's the way I want it.” In that sense, I was not too successful.

However, I was more successful with him when he was planning to make a major speech and we had a draft. Then I would take this draft, mark it up and tell him, “These are the points I am going to be pushing with the newsmen.” He always accepted that, and so I would in effect go around at the news bureaus over at the UN with what were my talking points.

Q: Many UN Ambassadors, being political appointees, almost all of them in fact, brought with them their own public affairs adviser or chose them themselves and not from the

career Foreign Service. I think you were one of the few, or one of the first, who actually was a career USIA officer.

MONSEN: I think so, yes. I was one of the very few.

As Head of National Security Advisory Staff, Monsen Handicapped By USIA Exclusion From Earliest NSC Preparatory Meetings

Q: Let's go on to the other second interesting assignment, at least from my point of view, interesting assignment because it is sort of unique. You headed for a time what was known as the National Security Advisory Staff. I believe this was during the time when Frank Shakespeare was the Director of USIA, President Nixon was in the White House and Henry Kissinger was National Security Advisor.

MONSEN: Yes.

Q: What was this National Security Advisory Staff? What did they do?

MONSEN: When Kissinger organized his own staff on the National Security Staff, he set up two committees. One was called the National Security Review Group, which he chaired. The other was chaired by the Under Secretary of State. At that time it was Elliot Richardson. The committee included the head or deputy of CIA, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and—

Q: Defense Secretary.

MONSEN: —and the Deputy Defense Secretary and the head of USIA. Shakespeare would attend about half the time. Henry Loomis attended about the other half. I was always more comfortable when Henry attended. The Agency had no staff for this sort of operation. There was no staff to prepare the papers and other backup materials for our man when he went to these meetings. Unfortunately for the Agency, we were not invited to attend and take part in the very early preparatory meetings that would define the issues or

problems and discuss policy options that would later culminate in the position papers to be taken up by the two committees.

Q: You only received your information at a later stage?

MONSEN: Yes. What would come to my office—sometimes three or four days ahead, sometimes as much as a week, oftentimes no more than 24 hours ahead of the meeting — would be a large thick book containing the so-called option papers that Kissinger was so fond of. There were usually five options, and our job was to take this rather thick book, summarize the problem, give a bit of the history and background of the problem and summarize the options. We would then make recommendations which we felt would be the most useful position for the Agency to take or the option that we thought our Director should support. When there was time enough, I tried to get supporting material from research or the Area Offices and so on so that the Director would go in armed with some evidence and material to support his point of view.

The big problem that we always found was that since the Agency had not been involved in the preliminary discussions on these policies, we didn't know they were coming up, so we were rarely able to have our research people, for example, conduct surveys or do the research necessary so that when our man would go in there he would have something unique to contribute. As Henry Loomis told me once, “When I go to one of these meetings, Elliot Richardson can say, 'Well, from the political standpoint of foreign policy, this is the way we see the situation.' The CIA guy can say, 'Well, our sources tell us the following.' The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs will say, 'From a military standpoint, this is our view of the problem.' What does the USIA officer have to say when he goes over there unless you can provide him with information about public opinion, public reaction?” But that usually takes time to gather. So we were at a disadvantage there because the Agency was not cut in early enough in the whole policy formulation process. Nevertheless we worked furiously and did our best with the task at hand for about a year.

Frank Shakespeare's Unusual Habits

I will say that Shakespeare had a rather curious habit. After we would prepare these briefing books and send them in with our recommendation, I would very often get a call that Mr. Shakespeare wanted to see me. I would go in and he'd say, “I have your memo about this.” He'd ask me to sit down, and he would stand up and pace back and forth and read the memo to me that I had just written to him. I was flabbergasted the first time because I was not sure how I should react. I didn't know whether to—

Q: Disown it.

MONSEN: Yes, I mean whether to say, good point, very well done, right on, or what. But I came to the conclusion that Shakespeare was a man who understood things better when he heard them than when he read them silently. He liked to hear something, and so he was not really reading them to me. He was reading them aloud but to himself, and I found that a rather curious habit.

Q: He came from the radio industry.

MONSEN: Yes, and occasionally he did something else that I found fascinating. After a meeting he would occasionally call me in, sometimes with Barbara White or sometimes with Bill Weathersby. Shakespeare would call us in and tell us what had happened at the meeting, but instead of just telling us what had happened at the meeting, he would imitate everybody. When he'd say, “Now, Kissinger would say this,” he'd lapse into a very excellent imitation of Kissinger's accent and so on. He could imitate the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and his mannerisms perfectly. It was a fascinating bit of theater, almost. The trouble is that he didn't often call us in. So when he went to a meeting, we rarely found out what happened.

Before Loomis went to a meeting, he first would call me in and get me to brief him in addition to the memo even if it meant having me walk with him across over to the White

House to talk to him if he was short of time. But during the meeting he took notes on the back of the briefing memo. So when he came back he would call me in, turn the notes over and then read his summary of the meeting on the back of my notes and then give them to me. That was a big help, because then we knew where to go from there, and precisely what had happened.

Kissinger Cuts Shakespeare Out of NSC Discussions

Anyway that's the way that went on for about a year, and then suddenly we discovered that we were not getting any more option papers. There seemed to be no more meetings. I made some inquiries of a friend of mine over on the NSC staff and he confided that Kissinger had decided that Shakespeare simply had such a bad case of tunnel vision where foreign policy was concerned—that is to say, the only thing he was interested in was the Soviet Union and anti-communism—that Kissinger regarded him as very much a sort of a loose cannon ball rolling around the deck. He didn't quite know how to fire him from this committee so Shakespeare stayed on the committee but Kissinger formed another committee and the NSC Review Group never met after that.

Q: So that is how jobs get started and how they end.

MONSEN: Yes. By the way, I would say one other thing. There were similar meetings with Elliot Richardson ostensibly to take the decision of the Security Council and then decide how it should be implemented. But those meetings were not quite as regular, and it also became evident that often it was almost impossible to tell whether an issue should go before the Review Group or the Richardson State Department group. The issues were never quite that clean cut because how you implemented the policy oftentimes was quite as complex as the type of policy you should be following, I learned. Anyway that was my brief exposure to that job.

By the way, Elliot Richardson's staff assistant at that time was Arthur Hartman.

Q: Oh, really? That is before he became Assistant Secretary-

MONSEN: Oh, yes. At that time he was sort of the Special Assistant to the Under Secretary.

Q: An interesting sidebar, since you mentioned Arthur Hartman, it was in 1975 when eight officers were nominated to be Career Ministers, and I was on that list. I didn't notice it at the time until The Washington Post had a little article saying that as long as Henry Kissinger is Secretary of State nobody except State Department, Foreign Service officers with German names are nominated to be Career Ministers. So I looked at the list again, and sure enough six of the people listed—I don't remember all of them—but Hartman, Hans Tuch were on that list and five others. Wells Stabler was the only Anglo-Saxon on the list. Oh, Helmut Sonnenfeldt.

Monsen Appointed Executive Secretary toU.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy: 1981-85

There was one other very interesting assignment that you had. Actually it was your last assignment before retirement in Foreign Service, and that was the position of Executive Director for the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. Was it already called Public Diplomacy at that time?

MONSEN: Yes.

Q: Yes. Tell us about what under your aegis the Advisory Commission did, how it functioned and what kind of influence did it have on the Agency and the Agency's operation.

MONSEN: During my tenure on that job I had two different chairmen, and the Commission acted somewhat differently under the two. The first Chairman was Leonard Silverstein, a prominent, wealthy Washington attorney who had also been President of the

National Symphony, very active in cultural affairs in Washington, a self-styled moderate Republican.

Q: Give me the dates of this assignment.

MONSEN: I'm not sure I can remember exactly. I guess I started about maybe December or something of '81 or thereabouts.

Q: To '85.

MONSEN: Yes.

Influence of Advisory Committee Dependent on Chairman

Q: Yes, you retired the day before I did.

MONSEN: Yes. In any event, the Advisory Commission was a bipartisan commission of seven members appointed by the President, confirmed by the Senate, and by statute they were supposed to report to the President, to the Chairmen of both the House and Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, the Secretary of State and the Director of USIA. How much influence they had at any given time depended to a very large degree on the Chairman.

As I say, Silverstein was, I thought, a rather wise man but a very cautious man, and he was very much concerned that we put out a good solid, heavily documented, annual report. The Commission had normally put out a report. It didn't put out a report every year but that was the general idea. So my first assignment there was to put out a report that would be acceptable to all the members of the Commission. It had to be a unanimous affair with the Republicans and the Democrats.

Silverstein in his caution did not believe that the Commission members ought to be traveling around the world at government expense. He was a wealthy man, and he thought that they ought to travel but they ought to pay their own way. But not all Commission

members were wealthy. I tried to persuade him that it would be a good idea for the Commissioners to get out and travel as much as possible so that they would learn first hand what our people did. In theory he agreed with this, but he was very cautious about spending government money and so there were not a lot of projects of that sort, although we did produce a long and thorough and, I think, a rather useful report. As a matter of fact, I think it was well received on the Hill, and I think that the Director paid some attention to it.

Silverstein was later replaced as Chairman by Ed Feulner, the President of The Heritage Foundation. He was a younger man, a very active man. Although he is well known for his very right wing conservative views, he was a strong supporter of USIA and our officers overseas.

Advisory Commission Takes on Very Conservative Tone—But Becomes Supportive of USIA Foreign Service

By that time most of the members of the Commission, whether Republican or Democrat, tended to be so conservative that Senator Claiborne Pell and others questioned how bipartisan the Commission really was.

Some of the members I think came in with a rather deep suspicion of career civil servants, but interestingly, when they started traveling overseas and meeting our Foreign Service officers, they almost invariably became enthusiastic about them. They seemed to make a distinction between the field officers and the officers in Washington, and they oftentimes tended to be somewhat suspicious or skeptical of officers who might be simply Foreign Service officers serving in Washington. But I can think of no instances when they were not only supportive of our Foreign Service officers abroad or come back enthusiastic about them.

Under Feulner they traveled a lot both individually and with the Commission itself, which held several meetings overseas. I thought this was a very fine thing, because it gave us a chance to bring in senior public affairs officers and others and have them spend some time

with the Commission. So I think that the Commission did become highly knowledgeable about Agency affairs and overseas affairs. And they were, and I think are, staunch supporters of public diplomacy as such and staunch supporters of our field operations.

Q: Do you believe that they had really substantive influence over the President, vis-a-vis the Congress, vis-a-vis the Secretary of State, vis-a-vis the USIA Director, because they are the ones that were addressed with their reports?

MONSEN: Yes.

Q: Did they enjoy their confidence, their respect and did they have influence?

MONSEN: I can't really believe that the President ever read any of these reports. He gets too many of them. He would always receive us when we would produce a new report. The President would receive us and he would accept the report very graciously and all. I can't really believe that he ever read it. Certainly President Reagan was very interested in public diplomacy, and I don't think he required any selling, if you will, to persuade him of the necessity and importance of the work that the Agency does.

Commission Helps VOA Finally Obtain FullCongressional Press Accreditation

How much influence we had on the Hill I think varied, but I think when the Commission decided to weigh in on a subject, they could have considerable influence. They did on a number of occasions testify before the House and Senate Committee in support of the Agency's budget and on a number of occasions would weigh in on specific issues with a Subcommittee of the House or Senate, or in some cases with individual Senators. For example, the Commission went to bat when Senator Mathias was Chairman of some kind of operational committee up there.

Q: Side 2 of an interview with Richard Monson conducted by me, Hans Tuch, on August 22, 1988. Please continue, Dick.

MONSEN: As I'm sure you remember from your days at the Voice, the Congressional Press Association had resolutely refused to grant the Voice of America full accreditation. And yet, as we pointed out to them, the correspondents from Izvestia-

Q: And Tass.

MONSEN: —and Tass all had full accreditation. The Voice was denied it because they considered we were a government propaganda agency, and yet Tass and Izvestia were accredited. The Commission, when we called this to their attention, quite properly felt that this was outrageous. We worked up some arguments for them, and they called on Mathias and a number of other Senators and Mathias actually held hearings on this subject. In spite of the fact that Phil. Jones, the CBS congressional correspondent, opposed it. He was the President of the Congressional Press Association. They strongly objected to the VOA's accreditation, but the Senate committee insisted on it and so we finally did get full accreditation for the Voice of America.

Q: Finally, this took I bet about 15 or 20 years.

MONSEN: Yes, I remember that being debated years ago. Anyway the Commission did apply some muscle and there were a few people on the Commission like Ed Feulner and Tom Korologos and one or two others who were in a position to do that.

Tom Korologos, a member of the Commission, who is a very well known and very highly respected lobbyist and sort of a specialist in congressional affairs, has been worth his weight in gold for the Agency because he could weigh in with a lot of guys very effectively. When we did come out with a new report, the Chairman and Korologos and myself and usually my deputy, Bruce Gregory, would go around and call on Pell, Percy, Fascell, and later Dan Mica and explain to them what we felt the main points of the report were, what our main recommendations were, and for the most part we got a good hearing from them.

Commission Criticizes Agency Practice of Reducing Overseas Personnel To Meet Budget Cuts While Increasing Washington Staff

Now, during my tenure there we established a system, whenever Wick was in town—of course the Director traveled a great deal—but whenever he was in town, we tried to arrange it so that he would come and either meet with the Commission on their monthly meetings for an hour or so or sometimes even have a brown bag lunch with us. So the Commission regularly met with the Director both so that he could keep them appraised of the things that he was doing and give them a chance to point out some of the things that they felt he should be aware of.

For example, at one point when the Agency had to make some budget reductions, the Commission became concerned—and I confess that I pointed this out to them and led them along that way a little bit—that when they had to make some economies, the easy thing for the Agency to do was to close a post overseas or to reduce the size of our overseas staff. My staff and I did some homework and we presented figures to the Commission members where you could see the size of the Washington staff steadily increasing and the size of overseas staff declining. This was also at a time when the exchange of persons program was being expanded and also when the Worldnet telepress conferences — so-called “interactive” programs—were being transmitted, and both of those programs were rather labor-intensive as far as the field posts were concerned. Yet none of the posts were getting any additional personnel. The Commission in their annual report that year criticize the Agency for this and made a recommendation that that be reversed. They also in their meetings with the Director pointed this out to him.

I think it had some effect. I would have to go back—and maybe I left the job too soon —and see what happened. But at least they did weigh in on that matter. They tried not only to criticize, but I think they tried also to be a source of support to him. I know that on occasions when the Director had some problem on the Hill he would come there for advice

and occasionally to see if they could help come up with some support. I thought that this was a very wise thing for Director Wick to have done.

Director Keogh Held Commission At Arm's Length

In contrast, another Director that I worked for once, Jim Keogh, whom I admired very much as a fine gentleman and a very decent man, became very suspicious of the Commission at his time. I was obviously not working on the Commission at that time. But he didn't want to be criticized. He didn't really want any outside advice, with the result that he kept the Commission at arm's length. In my opinion, he could have won them over and used them as a source of support, but instead he remained a bit suspicious of them and missed an opportunity for some support that he needed and could easily have had had he worked with them.

Wick did not make that mistake, and the Commission under both Silverstein and Feulner did their best to support him when they thought he was right, which was most of the time.

Recent Changes in Format of Advisory Commission Largely Result of Peter Galbraith's Influence on Senator Pell

Q: With your experience working with the Commission, why has there been in recent months, especially during the last year, under the new authorization act for USIA, why was such a drastic change made in the organization of the Commission? What motivated that?

MONSEN: Basically it seems to me that that stemmed from—I hate to talk in terms of personalities—but I believe that Peter Galbraith on Senator Pell's staff was really the motivating force on this. Some of the Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee particularly became somewhat concerned because they did not believe that some of the ostensibly Democratic members of the Commission were really representative of the Democratic Party. In fact, Senator Pell made the comment that he wished that the President would appoint Democrats to the Commission who were recognizable as

Democrats by other Democrats. There were certainly two, perhaps even three, of the Democratic members of the Commission who scarcely fit Senator Pell's definition of a Democrat. The result was that Galbraith and some other people up there became skeptical that this was really a bipartisan Commission. I don't know all the details, because I had retired by this time, but there was one draft amendment that would have created an entirely new Commission which would have not reported to the Senate and the House committees, would have not reported to the President, and would have simply been floating out in some kind of limbo. The members would have been appointed by a very cumbersome system, some by the President, some by the House and Senate.

Ultimately that did not materialize but what finally passed was an amendment which was written into the authorization act which made no mention of a bipartisan Commission nor did it make any mention of the fact that the Commissioners should serve for overlapping, staggered 3-year terms, which had always been true in the past. Instead they simply said that the Commission would be named by the President, confirmed by the Senate but should serve at the pleasure of the President. They made no mention of whether it would be bipartisan. There would not necessarily be any minority members on the Commission, and they could all be appointed at the same time and all be fired at the same time. In other words, it was unlikely that there would be the degree of continuity that there had been in the past. So the way it now looks, at the beginning of the new calendar year the new regulations will apply so that with a new administration the next President can appoint an entirely new Commission. Whether it will be a bipartisan Commission or not, one doesn't yet know.

Q: Well, thank you very much, Dick Monson. We will get this printed up and back to you for editing purposes. This will, I think, be a very good record for our oral history project. Thank you.

End of interview